

REMARKS

I. Introduction

Claims 11, 12, 14, 16, 18, and 20 to 33 are pending in the present application. It is respectfully submitted that all of the presently pending claims are allowable, and reconsideration is respectfully requested.

II. Rejection of Claims 11, 12, 14, 16, 18, and 20 to 33 Under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a)

Claims 11, 12, 14, 16, 18, and 20 to 33 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as obvious over JP 10-273873 to Wantabe ("Wantabe") and U.S. Patent No. 4,497,097 to Schneider et al. ("Schneider"). Applicants respectfully submit that the present claims are patentable over the combination of Wantabe and Schneider for at least the following reasons.

Claim 11 has been amended herein without prejudice to recite that the bonded fibers are stretched by passing them between a pair of rollers running at different speeds in a S-wrap configuration, wherein the spunbonded nonwoven exhibits no more than 5% shrinkage during manufacture. Support for this amendment can be found in the Specification, for example, at p. 4, lines 14 to 17, and p. 5, lines 17 to 22.

Wantabe purportedly relates to a base fabric for tufted carpets. Schneider purportedly relates to preparation of improved thermoplastic spun fleeces. Nowhere does the combination of Wantabe and Schneider disclose, or even suggest, stretching the bonded fibers of a spunbonded nonwoven, which is stretched using rollers in a S-wrap configuration, between needling stages, as required by amended claim 11.

The Office Action relies upon West German Offenlegungsschrift no. 1,635,634, discussed in Schneider at col. 1, line 56 to col. 2, line 11, for its disclosure of stretching between needling steps. The Office Action's reliance is misplaced, however, because West German Offenlegungsschrift no. 1,635,634 focuses on a method of manufacturing non-woven fabrics made of staples fibers not spunbonded nonwoven, as required by claim 11.

Further, West German Offenlegungsschrift no. 1,635,634 discloses stretching of plaited-down non-woven webs made of staples fibers between needling steps. In order to deal with uncontrolled contraction stretching is stated to be implemented in

small steps. See Schneider at col. 2, lines 1 to 8. Rather than relying on small stretching steps, which according to West German Offenlegungsschrift no. 1,635,634 requires expensive equipment (Schneider, col. 2, lines 3 to 4), the presently claimed invention stretches the web between needling stages, while limiting shrinkage to 5% or less, by passing it through rollers traveling at different speeds in a S-wrap configuration. Properties of the S-wrap stretching, e.g., a small gap between the rollers and the surface roughness of the rollers, minimize shrinkage. Nowhere does West German Offenlegungsschrift no. 1,635,634 or any of the cited references provide any suggestion, or motivation, for stretching the web of West German Offenlegungsschrift no. 1,635,634 using a S-roll configuration, as required by amended claim 11, between stretching steps because the uncontrolled contraction is already stated to be minimized through the use of small stretching steps. Therefore, the combination of Wantabe and Schneider does not render obvious claim 11.

Claims 12, 14, 16, 18, and 20 to 33 ultimately depend from claim 11 and therefore include all of the limitations of claim 11. Therefore, it is respectfully submitted that the combination of Wantabe and Schneider does not render unpatentable these dependent claims for at least the same reasons provided above in support of the patentability of claim 11.

Withdrawal of this rejection is therefore respectfully requested.

III. Conclusion

It is therefore respectfully submitted that all of the presently pending claims are allowable. All issues raised by the Examiner having been addressed, an early and favorable action on the merits is earnestly solicited.

Respectfully submitted,

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